

Carbapenem-Resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* (CRE) Patient FAQ



What is carbapenem-resistant *Enterobacteriaceae* (CRE)?

Enterobacteriaceae are a family of bacteria normally found in the bowels and the feces. Carbapenem is a very strong antibiotic. CRE are *Enterobacteriaceae* that are highly resistant to many antibiotics and may be difficult or impossible to treat.

Can CRE be harmful?

CRE may live harmlessly in the intestines. This is called colonization. However, *Enterobacteriaceae*, including CRE, can cause urinary tract infections, wound infections, pneumonia, blood stream infections and other serious infections.

Why should I care about CRE?

CRE can spread from one person to another in hospitals, long term care facilities (nursing homes) and other healthcare settings, as well as in the community. CRE is very difficult to treat, so it is important to keep it from spreading to other people. Hospitals and long term care facilities can prevent spread if they are very careful about hand washing between patients and follow other infection prevention measures.

Who is at risk for getting a CRE infection?

Infections are most often seen in patients who are hospitalized for a long time; those who are critically ill; and those who live in long term care facilities. Patients on ventilators (breathing machines), or with intravenous catheters or urinary catheters or wounds are more at risk. Patients who have received antibiotics are also more at risk.

How do people get CRE?

CRE is shed in the feces, urine or draining wounds of patients who have the bacteria. These patients can also have CRE on their skin, hands and bedding. In the room of a CRE patient, CRE can be found on doorknobs, bedrails, light switches, toilets, bedpans, bedside commodes, and bathroom fixtures. Healthcare workers can spread CRE if they do not use gowns and gloves when coming into the patient's room or if they do not wash their hands between patients. Blood pressure cuffs, thermometers and other devices can also have CRE on them and spread the infection to other patients.

How can I tell if someone has CRE?

Patients who are infected with CRE feel sick, but patients who are colonized have no symptoms. The healthcare facility should keep track of which patients have CRE or other drug-resistant bacteria

Is there a treatment for CRE infections?

Very few antibiotics can treat this infection. A laboratory must run tests to find out which antibiotics still work to treat CRE.

Division of Infectious Disease Epidemiology

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What should I do if I am diagnosed with CRE in a healthcare facility?

If you have CRE you may be placed in a private room with your own toilet or commode. If a private room is not available, you will usually be placed in the same room with another patient who has CRE. Always wash your hands with soap and water:

- before eating
- after using the bathroom
- after coughing or sneezing
- after contact with wound drainage or other body fluids

You may be allowed to leave your room and socialize but you must

- wash your hands and change into clean clothes before leaving your room
- keep any wounds covered
- cover your cough and wash your hands after coughing or sneezing, and
- follow any additional instructions from your doctor or nurse

You should also let your healthcare workers and healthcare facilities know if you have had a positive CRE result before. They can take special precautions to stop CRE spreading to other patients.

What happens when I am ready to leave the healthcare facility?

You can go home as soon as your doctor says you are ready, even if you have CRE. If you are going to another hospital or nursing home, your nurse or doctor should let them know about your positive CRE result so that they can prevent spread to other patients. However, you should also mention your CRE status to your healthcare provider, regardless of the setting.

What happens when I go home?

Clothes, bed linen and dishes can be washed as usual. It is always very important to wash your hands carefully after using the toilet and before preparing meals or eating to stop CRE spreading to other people. Also wash hands after coughing or sneezing, or after changing your dressing. Follow any other instructions your healthcare provider gives you.

How can I preventing spreading CRE to my loved ones?

Most healthy people are probably at relatively low risk for problems with CRE, but they may become carriers. Make sure that anyone who comes into your house is careful about washing their hands, especially after contact with your wounds or helping you use the bathroom or after cleaning up stool. Caregivers should also make sure to wash their hands before and after handling any medical device (e.g., urinary catheters). This is particularly important if the caregiver is caring for more than one ill person at home. In addition, gloves should be used before contact with body fluids or blood.

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Everybody in your house (including you) should also wash hands with soap and water:

Before eating;

Before preparing food;

After going to the bathroom; or

Any time hands are visibly dirty.

You should have your own room in your home and be sure to wash your hands and wear clean clothes when you come out of your room.

Your plate, utensils and glasses can be washed in the dishwasher or in the kitchen sink with warm soapy water. People in your household should use regular household cleaners to keep your bathrooms and kitchen tidy.

Will I get rid of CRE?

Your body may clear CRE from your bowels as you recover, but this is not always the case, and it may remain in your bowels for some time. Taking antibiotics can encourage CRE to grow in the bowels again, so they should only be taken for a very good reason. Antibiotics may be available to treat CRE infection but they will not clear CRE from the bowels.